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SUBJECT: Gagauz Legislative Elections Conducted Reasonably Well in
Second Round; Non-Communist Vote Split

REFS: A. Chisinau 0295, B. Chisinau 0267

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please Protect Accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Three Embassy teams monitored the March 30 runoff elections for the 17 undecided seats for the 35-seat Gagauz People's Assembly. In most constituencies, voters cast their secret ballots in well-run polling stations, but two victories could have been won with the aid of suspect applications for the traveling ballot box. End summary.

Communists Gain 14, Formuzal Gains 9 of 35 Seats

¶2. (SBU) Another sunny spring day and wide interest in elections supported a steady flow of voters in the 17 runoff constituencies. The Communist Party (PCRM) was fielding 15 candidates, to 14 "independent" backers of Gagauz Governor Mihail Formuzal, four "independent" backers of Comrat Mayor Nicolai Dudoglo, and one independent whose poll-watchers assured us was the one-and-only true independent among the 34 candidates. After two rounds, the results were approximately as follows. (Note: Two constituencies are likely to be contested because of winning margins of less than 1.3% for the Formuzal candidate and the Social Democratic candidate. In addition, it is unclear whom a few of the independents will really support once in the People's Assembly. End note.)

Party/Supporting	Round 1	Round 2	Total
PCRM	6	8	14
Formuzal	4	5	9
Independents	5	1	6
Democrat Party	2	0	2
Ravnopravie	1	1	2
Dudoglo	0	1	1
Social Democrats	0	1	1

¶3. (SBU) With these results, Formuzal will face some difficulty forming a working coalition majority of 18. The one Dudoglo supporter is problematic: he is unlikely to favor the PCRM, but Dudoglo's personal enmity with Formuzal (Ref B) could make relations difficult. The PCRM needs to recruit only four for a majority. Since Dumitru Diacov's Democrat Party abstained in the parliamentary vote for new PCRM Prime Minister Zinaida Greceanii, it is difficult to determine which way his two assembly members will vote. Ravnopravie is strongly anti-PCRM, but an unknown factor regarding its feelings about Formuzal. The one Social Democrat is likely to favor the Governor.

Polling Mostly Professional

¶5. (SBU) In all but two of the constituencies, procedures were

handled professionally and according to regulations: voters were instructed by posters, and guided by officials, through the process of registering, receiving the first stamp on their ballot papers, stamping their choice inside a curtained-off voting booth, receiving a second stamp on their folded ballots, and casting them into a clear plastic box. The transparent ballot boxes had been lined with wrapping paper half way up, after complaints in the March 16 first round that ballots were fluttering open and revealing the voter's choice. Voters who were not on the official list, but could prove their domicile with official ID, were given the chance to vote. According to law, in our observation all who showed up without ID, even if on the list and well known or even closely related to the registrars, were told to go home and bring their papers.

¶6. (SBU) In all constituencies, officials welcomed our interest warmly, and invited us to talk to officials and observers-at least two for each candidate, and one or two from LADOM (League for the Protection of Human Rights), the Moldovan NGO trained and contracted by the Eurasia Foundation to field observers. Jolly Gagauz folk music added a festive air to the serious attitude of almost all voters, who chatted cheerfully with friends before and after voting, but handled and marked their ballots with reverent care.

Problems-Mostly with the Mobile Ballot Box

¶7. (SBU) In three constituencies-the dirt-poor, dirt-road villages of Carbalia and Chirsova, and the more prosperous-looking town of Ferapontievca-official interference and suspect applications for house-call voting (the "mobile urns") marred the atmosphere. In Carbalia, despite a warm welcome in a chilly wreck of a community center, the PCRM mayor hovered over the proceedings in a clearly supervisory air. Voters cast ballots secretly, but there was no doubt who was in charge. The PCRM candidate in Carbalia beat his Socialist Party rival 190 to 107 votes (64% to 36%). It is

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difficult to tell whether the mayor's presence affected the vote, or merely reflected the leanings of the community.

¶8. (SBU) In Chirsova, we observed campaigning by candidates at the door of the polling station, and a large stack of requests for the traveling ballot box (over 100 at noon, out of a final total of 3,036 votes cast). The problem was worse in Ferapontievca, where over 70 requests had piled up by late morning, out of a total of 559 votes cast. In both constituencies, we observed many request letters written in the same script, and heard from officials that telephone requests were being honored, contrary to law. The PCRM candidate won in both constituencies-in Chirsova by 1,594 to 1,442 votes (52.5% to 47.5%), and in Ferapontievca by 341 to 218 ballots (61% to 39%).

¶9. (SBU) In both cases, the ballots cast at home could have influenced the result, especially in Ferapontievca, where the lunchtime number of such ballots-70-was over half the winning margin of 123 votes. In addition, observers were not able to accompany voting officials on their house calls unless they had their own cars or could afford a taxi. We did not hear of any observers who were able to do either. In contrast to possible misuse of the mobile ballot box, registrars in Cazaclia took the box down the 35 crumbling concrete steps from the polling station out to a wheelchair-bound voter, whom they registered and allowed to cast his ballot on the sidewalk.

Anecdotes: Disenfranchised Observer, Poor Teacher

¶10. (SBU) One FSN who accompanied as an interpreter wistfully noted the serious bustle of voters making their secret choice of candidates, and observed that she had lived for eight years in Chisinau, but had never been able to vote in what she now regards as her home town. Her national ID card identifies her as a resident of an isolated village, and she cannot change her domicile to Chisinau unless she owns an apartment or house in the capital, or if her landlord agrees to register her at her rental address-something he's not willing to do, because such registration can give the renter

potential ownership rights. Her desire to vote matched that of the Gagauz, but was thwarted by a still "undesovietized," rigid attitude towards registration of residence. In prosperous-looking Svetlii, on the main highway through south Moldova, an elegant observer, who spoke exquisite English, informed us that she was grateful for the extra income from her 14-hour day, because her pension of 500 lei per month (about USD 50), after 43 years of teaching, was evenly split between utility costs and everything else.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: In terms of the professionalism of voting staff and the right of voters to make an informed, free and secret choice, the Gagauz electoral glass appears to have been almost completely full. Concerns remain regarding the mobile ballot boxes, which, unlike the transparent boxes and processes at the polling stations, are susceptible to inflated requests and unobserved stuffing. End comment.